

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION – A NIGERIAN VIEW POINT

Okon Ugwu¹ and Oguud Felicia Mgbo²

¹Department of Public Administration, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo – Ebonyi State and

²Department of General Studies, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo – Ebonyi State

ABSTRACT

Socialization is a complex process through which individuals learn, assimilate and internalize the customs, norms and culture of the society, and from values that are acceptable to the society. The paper will examine the role of political socialization in the formation of political opinion and participation in the political system. The paper further exposes the negative impact which the Nigerian kind of Political socialization has on the political culture and by extension, on the participation of the individual in the political system. The paper identifies also the various factors that affects political participation of the individuals in the country.

KEYWORDS: Society, political system, culture, Nigeria, public opinion, socialization

INTRODUCTION

Public opinion is grounded on values. People acquire their values through socialization – a complex process through which individuals become aware of their environment, culture, and form values, every society seeks to be self sustaining, self preserving, and self developing. They do these by preserving those cultural values that make them unique. The process of socialization is one way by which the culture of a people is preserved because it involves the transmission of these culture from one generation to another. The process of socialization prepares the biological being to fit into the society and prepares him for the roles he is to play and providing him with the necessary foundation of behavioural patterns, beliefs and values that will make him suitable for integration into the society. This we must point out, ensures the continuity of the society and its values or culture.

From the above, one will understand that socialization provides a being with the necessary ingredients needed to participated in the activities of the larger society. By including moral values, behavioural patterns, habits and culture, socialization prepares a person as “rite of passage” to face societal challenges and participatory mien within his environment. Thus, participation could be social, civic, religious or political. This paper is intended to show how political socialization can affect a person’s political participation using Nigerian insights. Using Nigeria as a point of departure, tells a story of the kind of political participation occasioned by the unfortunate political culture contrived by the ruling elite in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

For ease of understanding, we consider it very important to clarify issues in this paper. This is by way of bringing out in clear relief the implications of the two major concepts central to the paper. The concepts are political socialization and political participation.

Political Socialization

Like we said earlier of socialization, public opinion is grounded on political socialization which itself is a complex process through which individuals become aware of politics, learn political facts, and form political values (Berry and Goldman 1989). Many scholars have defined political socialization variously but all seem to agree that the process of political socialization which is an endless thing involves the transmission of a people’s groups or society’s political culture from generation to generation. Thus Almond and Verba (1963) defines political culture as a people’s predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments and evaluation about the political system. It is this political culture that political socialization transmits.

The world itself is a learning process. It is in a state of flux, therefore learning and by extension, socialization is a continuous process that terminates only in death. Easton and Denis (1969) have also defined the concept as those developmental processes through which persons acquire political orientations and patterns of behaviour. Some practical personal illustrations may be very pertinent here. Remember your earliest encounter with a political figure

say a commissioner or your earliest memory of a governor. Now consider your earliest knowledge of political party and party politics. What influenced you to identify with a political party if you did? What of the atomic bomb? How did you first learn about it? You may have probably remembered that it goes back to your childhood days. Political socialization and socialization in general starts from childhood.

There are different patterns of political socialization. Thus, behaviouralists have attempted to distinguish by using four analytical categories which are related. These include: Agencies; Process; Time-span, and Change. Agencies refer to the medium via which socialization will germinate. Included here are both the primary and secondary agencies, etc. The family is regarded as the dominant agent of socialization. There is an extreme angle to the issue of socialization and this refers to the process. Process is of two kinds, latent and manifest processes. Latent aspect of socialization is always associated with the primary agency which the manifest is associated with the secondary agency. The time span of socialization refers to an individual's formative years. The concept of change refers to the structural consequences of socialization on the political system. Change here could either be systemic or non-systemic.

Political Participation

Many people hold strongly albeit wrongly that political participation is all about voting in an election. Far from this because there are other forms of participation, and sometimes they are more effective than voting. There are conventional and unconventional participation (Berry and Goldman 1989). Government ought to be run by the people. This is the democratic ideal in a nutshell. But how much and what kind of citizen's participation are necessary for democratic governance? Champions of direct democracy believe that if citizens do not participate directly in government affairs, making government decisions among themselves, they should give up all pretence of democracy. Voting in an election is however central to the majoritarian of government, but it is not the only means of political participation. Having said all these, we can now attempt a definition of political participation.

Political participation refers to "those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics (Milbrath and Goel, 1977). This definition embraces the two types of participation – conventional and unconventional forms. Conventional behaviour is the behaviour that is acceptable to the dominant culture in a given situation. Thus plastering campaign posters on public buildings is conventional; writings slogans on walls is not. Voting, and membership of a political party are examples of conventional political participation; staging sit-down strikes in public buildings and thuggery are examples of unconventional political participation. Violent protest is unconventional. Political participation is a dependent variable as a result of variations in the socialization pattern of individuals. These include the extent or level of participation. The level or extent of participation has been classified by Milbrath and Goel (1977) to comprise the gladiatorial – involving public and party office holders, electoral candidates, and strategists. The transitional refers to contributors – monetary and attendees of party meetings and in fact party identification; and the spectatorial which are emblem carrying people, canvassers, etc.

Impact of Political Socialization on Political Participation

This paper is devoted to finding how the socialization process in the political system affects an individual's participation in the political system. In other words, we would want to expose how this complex process impacts on the political participation of the individual do affect or impact on the individual's nature and level of political participation. No two people are influenced in precisely the same way. Each individual experiences a unique process of political socialization and forms a unique set of political values. Since political socialization is the transmission of political culture, the latter must be at issue here and must be central to this paper. We therefore need to investigate the place of political culture in political participation.

The Impact of Political Culture

Political socialization has been identified as the transmission of political culture from one generation to another. If one must investigate the interplay of politics and socialization in political participation, the best place to commence is from the 'area' of political culture.

Political culture according to Almond and Verba (1963) is a people's predominant beliefs, attitudes, values, ideals, sentiments and evaluations about the political system. Almond and Verba further classified political culture into the

broad categories using as a justification the level of participation and consciousness. The first category they called parochial political culture. People in this category do not have specialized knowledge, feelings and judgment about the system, structures, roles, personnel and output. They hardly make any input in the system and expect virtually no output from the political system. This kind of situation occurs in primitive traditional societies, suberu observed.

The second category is the subject political culture. Here, members of the political system are aware of a specialized governmental or political authority and are affected by the output of this political authority. In spite of this awareness, their relationship to the political system is essentially passive.

The third and last category is the participant political culture. Here the members of a political system are explicitly and actively oriented to both the input and output aspects of the system and are affected by the output of the political system. The members also tend to be oriented towards the operation of the political system. One can find this in many of the established or consolidated liberal democratic countries. From the foregoing, one can deduce that one's participation in the political system is conditioned or influenced by the inherent political culture in the system. Some countries no doubt have more participatory culture than others, in which case they are more enthusiastic and proud in their institutions and are more effective in the role they place (Jackman, 1987)

Political culture per se does not account for political participation but when this culture is transmitted through the process of socialization, it can then impact on political participation. How does it do this, it is the 'how' that we are trying to address in this paper. In order to ascertain the impact of political socialization on political participation, we would direct our attention to certain variables while also bearing in mind the role of some socialization agents in the political participation of the individual.

Age Dimension of Socialization

As many scholars as a number of studies have established the various positive relationship that exist between age, political interest, and political participation. Crittenden (1963) has established this causal relationship between age and political interest which in turn lead to active political participation. Neuman (1986) has also observed the linkage of political sophistication to age-related increases in political participation and argued that political sophistication was the product of three stages of socialization, viz – early, adolescent, and adult. According to Neuman, in early socialization, the family is important; formal schooling and sex role is associated with adolescence socialization while in the adult phase, group participation, income and age play important roles. The underlying proposition here is that political participation tend to increase with age.

Civi Competence

This is knowledge and habits of knowledge acquisition relevant to politics. The assumptions here is that those who posses' greater civic competences are more likely to participate in politics and as a result are able to make discriminatory judgment. John Strate (1989) argues that the acquisition of civic competence is partly an age-related process.

Agents of Socialization

Agents of socialization impinge on political participation because the family as a primary agent influences the child. It is not surprising that most people link their earliest memories of politics to their families. Moreover, when parents are interested in politics, they influence their children to become more politically interested and informed. This is perhaps why in Nigeria, children of the old politicians tend to continue making waves in politics even after their parents have passed on. The present issue of Dr. Bukola Saraki, Governor of Kwara State who is protégé of the second republic senate leader Dr. Olusola Saraki; Senator Udo Udoma, Mrs. Abiola Dosumu, who are children of Justice Udo Udoma and Chief M.K.O. Abiola respectively are valid examples of this type of participation occasioned by the family tradition. In Imo State, Barr. Tonny Anyanwu who was a member of the House of Representatives between 1999-2003 is the son of Senator Tonny Anyanwu. A Senator in the second republic. One of the most politically important things that many children learn from their parents is party identification. This is learned in much the same way as religion. School itself influences political participation. Students learn to get involved in politics by vying for offices in their various clubs. Moreover, education gives one the leverage in political participation. The media also play important roles in socialization, hence participation. Some people are motivated into party identification and membership as a result of the party's manifesto and sweet jingles on radio and television

Parents' Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Political socialization starts in the family and infact all forms of socialization. This can only indicate that the status of a family will definitely affect the children's socialization and by implication, their participation in politics. Participation, it has been established correlates closely with an individual's socio-economic status (ESE). The higher one's SES, the greater the likelihood of active participation in politics. Little wonder the Nigerian political scene has almost been over run by the nascent and emergency millionaires and fraudsters (a.k.a. 419 } For one, the motivation is there. politics anywhere but more especially in Nigeria involves a lot of stakes including monetary stakes, especially at the level of participation. This makes it more prone to participation by people with higher SES. Verba and Nie (1972) have included education, occupation and income and several civic attitudes which are bought to explain the association between SES and participation. In general terms, the high socio-economic status (SES) families participate more in politics than the lower ones and since the SES of the parents determine the SES of the children therefore the children's orientation is influenced by using their parent's SES to place them in the setting that forester's civic involvement and competence.

Sex Dimension to Political Socialization

An important element in the relationship between political socialization and political participation is the different ways the political socialization of the sexes affect their participation. There are differences in the socialization of the sexes because the early socialization of children has long emphasized the public roles of males and the private roles of females (Jennings 1983). This goes a long way to explain why men have higher participation level in politics than women. In Northern Nigeria, and among core Moslems, it is almost a taboo for women to involve in politics at whatever level. The trend is gradually changing but complete participation of women in politics in the Northern Nigeria can never be realized given the predominant Islamic tenets in the north.

Other Parental Factors

There are factors associated with parents that can influence the political life of the children. These include:

- a. The parent's civic orientation and knowledge. This influences the children's interest in politics either way of negative or positive.
- b. Parents' active participation in politics. This also influences the children. Politics is "infectious", and the "virus" will definitely infect the children of parents that are actively involved in politics more than those with parochial or subject political orientations. Again, through the process of imitation, children of politically active parents adopt the stand of their parents. Children are here motivated to follow the footsteps of their parents. Such people like the Awolowo's, Kuti's, Nwodo's, Mbadiwe's in Nigeria, and the Ghandi in India, the Kennedy in the United States of America are valid examples. Children from such families are also motivated by the challenge to maintain the family reputation and political tradition.

Political Climate and Political Participation

The political climate and environment of a nation can produce either positive or negative effect on political participation. A child who is socialized in the climate of political thuggery, acrimonious rivalry, political assassinations and political contests fraught with election rigging and vituperations will tend to develop negatively or entirely discouraged participation. "Politics" is a dirty game" is a slogan people have come to identity with politics and politicking over time. This tends to discourage people from participation. Some are socialized with equating politics with lies – this tends to produce alienation.

Generally, unhealthy political climate discourages political participation. In Nigerian, the June 12 psychotic melodrama has produced a lot of apathy to political activities in Nigeria. A lot of people still find it hard to believe in the sincerity of any transition programme in Nigeria. This has succeeded in reducing active political participation including voting in election. A valid case is the Nigeria political climate which has become a mirage by the actions of the hegemonic Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in elections in Nigeria. Elections in Nigeria has turned to selection and electoral fraud perpetrated by the PDP has made people loose faith in elections. Presently, people do not have faith in elections any longer. The PDP has become satanically hegemonic and devilish in their approach to politics in Nigeria. This has created a climate of fear and understandable distaste for politics. Apathy is the principal estuary of that sea of socio-political maladjustment of which the PDP is the source. A situation where a state Governor elect polled 230,000 votes to win an election is deplorable. The point to be drawn here is that the political environment (climate) itself is a socializing agent and it is capable of impacting either negatively or positively on

political participation. Every human being is a product of his environment. This goes to show that one's environment is important in building his person. Today, the PDP has succeeded in creating a legion of political thugs and criminals who now believe that elections must be hijacked and have been socialized in the act of intimidation of political opponents including possibly elimination of political opponents and perceived political threats. A charged atmosphere as in the case of Western Regional crisis of 1962 can dampen one's interest in politics. The worst is the charade called the 2007 election which is comparable in intensity only to the criminal annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential election in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

We have tried so far to identify the impact of political socialization on political participation. We have succeeded in establishing that the way a child is socialized, and the environment definitely impacts on his political participation. We identified certain factors which induce participation. They include political culture it is true that the political culture of a place or society is central to this process. It has no direct bearing on political participation. This is because political culture itself is latent as culture as a whole. It is through socialization process that these culture are generically transmitted to produced effect. Therefore, it is the transmission of culture (socialization) that enhances participation.

While accepting culture and socialization as being central to our investigation, we also identified other factors that enhance political participation. They included: Age, Civic competence, Socio-economic status, Sex and other parental factors like parents' civic orientation and active participation and involvement. We also identified the general political climate and environment of politics as having a bearing on political participation. We still conclude that the Nigerian political culture of fraud, violence, thuggery and irresponsible deceit has created an unfortunate political situation and a jaundiced system in the country.

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Corresponding Author:

Oko Ugwu

Department of Public Administration, Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo – Ebonyi State